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## The Hidden War

Several editorial pages broke out in rhetorical hives a few days ago after The New York Times reported the CIA might be looking for a way to get back into the domestic counterintelligence business. Alas, the leaked story was a bit overdrawn and the outrage premature. The Reagan administration assured everyone that CIA agents, on the whole, continue to remain blindfolded until outside the 200-mile limit. To the extent anyone keeps track of spies, saboteurs, terrorists, KGB disinformation specialists and assorted other troublemakers here at home it is done by the FBI.

The specific issue here was whether the CIA might once again be allowed to "spy" on American citizens. We admit to some ambivalence of our own. Liberty ranks high on our value scale and we frequently marvel at how well this political society functions while at the same time sheltering political agitators from all over the world, not to mention quite a few American citizens who adhere more closely to Soviet than to libertarian views. Hammer and sickle flags were flying on some college campuses this very week in support of the Soviet line against U.S. aid to the Communist-threatened government of El Salvador. Some of the organizers of those demonstrations hadn't been active since they helped bring about a domestic political defeat for the U.S. Vietnam policy more than a decade ago.

Freedom itself probably is the best protection this country has against the possibility of fringe activists polluting the main political stream. All views contend in a vast American complex of communication and debate. Last fall that process produced as President the man who was the least sympathetic of all the major candidates to the views of the international left.

But we will admit to occasional disquiet over whether this nation is adequately equipped to defend political freedom here and abroad against subversion. However much one might spoof the "Communists-under-the-bed" attitude, we can see ever more clearly that there is, in the non-Communist world, a Communist network attempting to undermine governments and institutions through the time-tested techniques of terrorism, disinformation and political agitation. We can't imagine why anyone would be surprised at claims that this effort is

secret police have for years practiced these same arts to manipulate populations under Soviet control.

A serious new book called "The Terror Network," written by journalist Claire Sterling, says, "There is massive proof that the Soviet Union and its surrogates (e.g., the Cubans, East Germans and Libyans) over the last decade have provided the weapons, training and sanctuary for a world-wide terror network aimed at the destabilization of Western democratic society." She documents dozens of cases in such places as Turkey, Ireland, Italy and parts of Latin America.

The CIA itself identifies 140 terrorist bands from more than 50 countries on four continents. It says these bands are linked in one way or another and have received Soviet help of some kind, ranging from money to propaganda to guerrilla training to supply of weapons. Moreover, the activities of these groups have spread well beyond Third World "hot spots." More than half of the international terrorist attacks since 1968, the CIA says, have taken place in Western Europe and North America. (It might be noted, in this connection, that atrocities in El Salvador were hardly noticed by the outside world when they were being conducted by terrorists against bus drivers, farm workers and businessmen. It was only when the anti-Communist counterattack began and there were atrocities committed by the right that the marches and demonstrations in North America and Europe came into play.)

Beleaguered Italy and other Western European nations have lately endeavored to beef up and co-ordinate counterinsurgency operations, but the U.S., if anything, apparently has reduced such capabilities. Theodore Shackley, a 30-year CIA veteran, goes so far as to claim, in "The Third Option: An American View of Counterinsurgency Operations," that the U.S. effort "largely disintegrated." Mr. Shackley's disaffection is understandable, since he was one of the victims of the wholesale purge of clandestine services conducted by Admiral Stansfield Turner on behalf of Jimmy Carter in 1977. Yet his view is not without weight. He claims it would now take at least three years to train a new cadre of guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency experts.

Despite the flare-up over the

two agencies along with greater freedom to keep an eye on individuals and groups where there is reasonable suspicion of subversive activities, even when the people involved are legally classified as American citizens.

A recent report by the Consortium for the Study of Intelligence, composed of ex-intelligence officers and academics, notes that the purpose of counterintelligence is to "learn about and neutralize the activities of the nation's enemies." It believes that present restrictions on the CIA and FBI make this task impossible. The test applied in deciding whether to keep a file on an American is not "reasonable suspicion" but the much stricter "probable cause." This restriction is imposed even though, in the absence of outright crime, the file will not be seen by anyone outside the intelligence agencies.

Easing such curbs would be fairly modest changes on behalf of agencies that, like the military forces and cops on the beat, are in business to protect the lives and liberties of the ordinary Americans who have no desire to turn the place over to international thugs. The combating of terrorism and domestic espionage always involves a contradiction between preserving constitutional rights and protection of national security. It also is true that the Soviet international enterprise has natural limitations — particularly in the repugnance decent people feel toward terrorist methods — and should not be overestimated as a political weapon. But neither should it be underestimated. For one thing, there is a risk of the level of troublemaking rising high enough to touch off an angry U.S. backlash that really would damage constitutional protections. For that and other reasons, we hope that when the subject of internal security next comes up for public discussion there will be more respect for all